

Message Text

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ACTION ORM-02

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 DHA-02 FDRE-00
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R 140845Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6648
INFO AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USMISSION GENEVA
USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 1507

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, AG, UNHCR
SUBJECT: UNHCR PROPOSAL TO CONDUCT CENSUS OF SAHRAOUI REFUGEES

1. GHASSEN ARNAOUT, UNHCR REP IN ALGIERS, CALLED ON EMBOFF JUNE 12 AND, DURING COURSE OF GENERAL CONVERSATION, DISCUSSED UNHCR'S PLAN TO CONDUCT CENSUS OF SAHRAOUI REFUGEES IN TINDOUF REGION. ARNAOUT BEGAN BY SHOWING EMBOFF COPY OF LETTER FROM WALDHEIM TO HIGH COMMISSIONER SADRUDDIN AGA KHAN REQUESTING THAT UNHCR CONDUCT CENSUS. ARNAOUT THEN ALLOWED EMBOFF TO READ REPORT TO SADRUDDIN WHICH ARNAOUT HAD PREPARED.

2. MAIN POINTS IN ARNAOUT'S REPORT WERE:

A. IN CONVERSATION WITH ARNAOUT IN TINDOUF, POLISARIO REPS HAVE PUT NUMBER OF REFUGEES AT 70,000-100,000. ARNAOUT HIMSELF REPORTS THE FIGURE AS BEING POSSIBLY AS HIGH AS 50,000.

B. REFUGEES ARE IN SOME 17 CAMPS, DIVIDED INTO
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ADMINISTRATIVE "DISTRICTS" OF EL AYOUN, SMARA AND DAKHLA. ARNAOUT PROPOSES THAT UNHCR SEND TEAM OF 15 TECHNICIANS, ALL OF WHOM WOULD SPEAK EITHER SPANISH OR ARABIC AND WHO WOULD BE DIVIDED INTO THREE FIVE-MAN TEAMS TO SERVE EACH DISTRICT. CENSUS PROCESS COULD BE COMPLETE IN 10 DAYS.

C. TWO MAJOR PROBLEMS WILL BE DETERMINING WHO IS A SAHRAOUI AND GEETING PARTIES TO AGREE TO DEFINITION. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF, ARNAOUT APPEARED LESS CATEGORICAL THAN IN PAST THAT VAST MAJORITY OF TINDOUF CAMPS' POPULATION WAS FROM FORMER SPANISH SAHARA. IT QUITE POSSIBLE, HE SAID, THAT THERE WERE MALIANS AND NIGERIENS PRESENT AS WELL, ESPECIALLY SINCE POOR RANGE CONDITIONS CREATED BY SAHEL DROUGHT WOULD MAKE NOMADS MORE WILLING TO GO ONTO REFUGEE CAMP DOLE.

3. ARNAOUT SAID THAT WALDHEIM WAS MOVING FORCE BEHIND CENSUS PROPOSAL. REASON FOR THIS IS THAT SYG UNDER CONSTANT PRESSURE FROM ALGERIANS NOT TO ABANDON SAHRAOUI SELF-DETERMINATION CAUSE.

4. ARNAOUT SAID THAT CENSUS PROPOSAL HAD BEEN PRESENTED TO GOA, AND NOTED IN HIS REPORT THAT FORMER ALGERIAN UN PERMREP RAHAL (NOW MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION) HAD INDICATED ALGERIAN ACCEPTANCE OF IDEA. SO FAR, HOWEVER, ALGERIANS HAVE MADE NO COMMENT ON PROPOSAL AND HAVE POINTED OUT TO ARNAOUT THAT RAHAL NO LONGER INVOLVED IN SETTING SAHARA POLICY.

5. COMMENT: CENSUS PROPOSAL WOULD APPEAR TO BE IN FOR ROUGH SAILING. IT MAY BE THAT ALGERIANS WOULD PREFER IN GENERAL TERMS TO KEEP SITUATION STATISTICALLY VAGUE AND IN PARTICULAR TO AVOID CAREFUL SCRUTINY
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OF CAMP LIFE AND ADMINISTRATIVE SET UP BY OUTSIDE OBSERVERS.LYNE

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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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